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ABSTRACT

Given the increased popular and academic interest in futuristic topics, interested instructors should prepare for teaching futures studies courses. In doing so, teachers can begin by acquainting themselves with relevant literature and by participating, if possible, in the activities of the World Future Society and other organizations devoted to futures topics. After this exposure to futuristic themes, the instructors can incorporate futuristic content into their current courses, keeping in mind five general principles: (1) the challenges of the future are in part determined by present trends; (2) futures studies involve the use of scenarios and other forecasting tools; (3) the complicated challenges of the future require creative problem-solving; (4) each individual can influence the future by his/her present actions; and (5) in studying the future, the individual must become sensitized to others' perspectives and values. Course content should involve a general thematic examination at the secondary level and an examination of forecasting techniques at the postsecondary level. Course objectives should aim at enabling students to become conscious of future problems, to think in the future tense, and to plan for and achieve scenarios of the future. These objectives can be achieved through seminars and simulation exercises. (Selected student responses to a futures course and a 56-item bibliography are included.) (JP)

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A TEACHER'S GUIDE TO SETTING UP A FUTURES STUDIES COURSE

by

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A TEACHER'S GUIDE TO SETTING UP A FUTURE STUDIES COURSE

by Harry Wagschal

One of the most exciting prospects available to teachers in a variety of disciplines (particularly History, Social Studies, English, Geography) is the intense popular and academic interest currently being manifested in the area which is known as 'future studies', 'futurism', or 'futurology'. Serious interest in this area was expressed by the academic and intellectual community in the recent 1st Global Conference on the Future sponsored by the 'World Future Society' and the 'Canadian Future Studies Association' which attracted over 5000 concerned individuals and international attention from the press and televsion. In the last decade a proliferation of course offerings on the theme of futurism have become available to students and the general public.[1]

At the same time a large popular interest in 'futuristic' type topics is clearly demonstrated by the growing interest in magazines such as 'OMNI', Next', 'Futurific', 'Science and Living Tomorrow'. There is little doubt that the time is ripe for a dedicated teacher or group of teachers to begin offering courses which deal with futuristically oriented topics such as the changing role of the family, energy consumption, values, ethics for the future and the electronic and computer revolution. But how can a teacher begin to prepare for the teaching of courses on the future when only a handful of M.A. programs in the field exist in proximity to him?

[1] See 'The Future - A Guide to Information Sources', World Future Society Washington, D.C., 1979.

In my own opinion the first prerequisite is that a teacher becomes acquainted with the general literature in the area through reading and discussion.[2] An enthusiastic teacher might join or even form a local chapter of the World Future Society where in monthly or bi-monthly meetings he or she can arrange to discuss books by authors such as Toffler, McLuhan, Theobald, Erhlich or Fuller. An aspiring future studies teacher should also attend the national conferences of the Education Section of the World Future Society or even register for pre- and post- conference courses in teaching futures.[3]

Once having been exposed to the new themes and concerns of futurism a teacher should probably attempt to integrate some of these 'futurist' writings into his own course material be it Social Studies, History, English, or the like. An extremely useful guide for postulating objectives for futuristic type courses are the 5 general goals for a future studies course.[4]

1. The challenges of the future are in part determined from past ideas, trends and decisions, as well as current issues and problems.
2. Futurists use many tools and concepts, including forecasts, scenarios and complex systems, as they focus on the future.
3. The challenges of the future are very complicated and interrelated. Planning and creative problem solving meet these challenges.

[2]At the end of this article there is a substantial list of books and sources for the aspiring future studies teacher.

[3]I was extremely fortunate in being able to attend a 2 day seminar on 'Teaching Futurism' just before participating in the 1st Global Conference on the Future

[4]I am indebted to E. Seif of Temple University, Philadelphia for this material.

4. All of us can and will influence the future by our actions and decisions in the present.
5. Our ability to share in the human drama and become sensitized to our own and others' perspectives, potential, and values. helps frame the future of the world.

Specific Goals for a Future Studies Course

1. To become more conscious of future problems and issues;
2. To think in the future tense;
3. To apply learning to the future;
4. To think about choices;
5. To understand futurist concepts, such as trends, forecasts, systems, change, choice scenarios, etc.;
6. To think about the kind of future wished for, and ways to help make it happen;
7. To use a variety of skills to plan for the future and solve future-oriented problems -- to use anticipatory decision-making, imagination, creativity.

Some assumptions around which this course is built:

Your interests

Future oriented concepts and skills

Your responsibility

Choice

Diversity

Experimentation

Student feedback and input

At the secondary level a concern with general thematic and critical treatment of specific areas would be useful for dealing with a student's perspective on the future while at the College and University level more emphasis and concern should be placed on actual techniques and procedures such as the Dephi Method of Social Forecasting, Cybernetics and General Systems theory. Some areas which I have found useful in my own teaching include:

Content (lectures and teacher directed presentations)

1. The Study of the Future
2. The Limits to Growth Debate
3. Urbanization and Human Values
4. Mass Communications and the Future
5. Creating the Future

Possible Topics for Student Presentation

The Energy Crises

Alternative forms of Energy

Future of Electronic Media

Changing Role of the Family

Futuristic Architecture

World Federalism

Crime and Mental Illness

Education Alternatives

Alternatives to Health Care

The New Therapies

The Modern Corporation

Others

In terms of teaching methodology there are a large variety of teaching options available to the potential future studies teacher depending on the size of the class and the teacher's own background in the areas under consideration. One method which seems to be extremely useful is the 'seminar-style presentation method' where after a period of six weeks of teacher-directed orientation on the study of the future, students are broken into groups of 2 or 3 and choose topics for presentation to the class at a specific date. These student presentations are then discussed and evaluated in the classroom both by the teacher and the rest of the class for criteria such as content, organization and usage of A/V material. Other techniques include simulation type exercises such as participating in Buckminster Fuller's World Games, or inviting speakers on various topics to the class on a regular basis. As well, the class might hold a 'futures fair' with exhibits about new conceptions of space technology and robots in our daily lives and the potential effects of new revolutionary developments in communications technology.

In some informal evaluative research which was carried out on my own course given at Dawson College called 'Future Alternatives' students' reactions were of a highly enthusiastic mind. Here are some examples of students' feelings and opinions about this particular course:

"I really enjoyed the Future Alternatives course. It was the type of course that no one dreaded coming to. It provided the students with fresh, new, different ideas."

"This course Future Alternatives has been very knowledgeable. I liked the oral presentations very much for they enhanced your intelligence.

"The class atmosphere was also very pleasant so discussions were possible and entertaining."

"I'm taking time out to congratulate you, Mr. Wagschal, as you have opened my eyes to the changing world around me. It prepares me mentally for this technological society in which we live. The course is extremely fascinating and well thought out. More of these types of courses should be offered both in high schools and universities."

"This was my favourite class all semester, it was great! It was a pleasure to go to this class, it was informative as well as interesting.

"The subject matter is excellent, I've never gotten so wrapped up in a class before. It is great to go to a class that you enjoy."

Teachers who are contemplating setting up a course of this type or who might wish to form a network of Canadian Future Studies Teachers might wish to write to me at Dawson College, Departments of Sociology and Humanities, 350 Selby Street, Westmount, Quebec, H3Z 1W7.

Good luck!

Some Examples of Useful Books/Resources for Teaching Future Studies

Teaching Resources

Draper Kauffman, Teaching the Future. Palm Springs, CA.: ETC Publications, 1976.

Fitch and Svengalis, Futures Unlimited: Teaching About Worlds To Come. Washington, D.C.: National Council for the Social Studies, Bulletin 59, 1979.

Ronald T. Laconte, Teaching Tomorrow Today. N.Y.: Bantam Books, 1975.

The Future: A Guide to Information Sources (Second Edition), Washington, D.D. World Future Society, 1979.

2000 A.D., Multi-Media Kit published by Newsweek, 1973.

An Inquiry Into the Future of Mankind: Designing Tomorrow Today, Two part Sound Slide Set published by The Center for the Humanities, White Plains, N.Y. 10603

Humanus, a simulation game published by Simile II, 218 Twelfth St., Del Mar, CA 92014 (simulates problems faced by a small group of survivors of a world-wide catastrophe)

World Future Society Catalogue contains additional readings, games, films, etc.

Edwin Cornish and others, The Study of the Future. Washington, D.C.: World Future Society, 1977. Contains book, student handbook and Teacher's Guide.

Many organizations have materials that are helpful in teaching about the future. These include the National Council for Social Studies, National Council for Teachers of English, National Education Association, American Association for the Advancement of Science, Association of Supervision and Curriculum Development, and so on.

Two organizations that I find helpful include the National Humanistic Education Center, 110 Spring St. Saratoga Springs, N.Y. 12886, especially the First Catalogue for Humanizing Education (Books in this catalogue can be ordered through this center) and People Books Catalogue from People Books, 8504 Germantown Ave., Philadelphia, Pa., 19118

Making Changes, A Futures Oriented Course in Inventive Problem Solving, developed by John W. Thomas, is available from Research for Better Schools, Philadelphia, Pa.

Dunstan and Garlan, Worlds in the Making: Probes For Students of the Future. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.:Prentice-Hall, 1970

Garlan and Dunstan, StarSight: Visions of the Future, Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1977.

Generally Useful Books for Information and Use in Teaching

Paul Dickson, The Future File: A Guide for People with One Foot in the 21st Century. New York: Rawson Associates, 1977 (in Paper)

Arthur C. Clarke, Profiles of the Future, Revised Edition. New York: Harper and Row, 1973

Robert Liston, Promise or Peril? The Role of Technology in Society, New York: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1976.

Aurelio Peccei, The Human Quality. New York: Pergamon Press, 1977.

Maxwell N. Norman, Dimensions of the Future: Alternatives for Tomorrow. New York: Holt Rinehart and Winson, 1974 (Note: series of readings may provide a text for a future studies course).

Gerald Leinwald, General editor, The Future, New York: Pocket Books, 1976. (Good book of readings, but I believe it is out of print).

Lyle E. Schaller, Understanding Tomorrow. Abington Press, Nashville Tennessee, 1976

James Ramey, Intimate Friendships, Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1976.

Alvin Toffler, Future Shock ,

The Futurist Magazine and reprints from it (see WFS Catalogue)

Articles from newspapers and magazines, including Omni, Science 80, and others.

The Hammond Almanac, 1979 (with an introduction on the future)

(***Note: There are many other books by such authors as Willis Harmin, Robert Theobald, and so on. The above list are some examples of helpful books)

Future Forecasts

Herman Kahn, et. al., The Next 200 Years: A Scenario for America and the World, New York: William Morrow and Co., 1976

Mesarovic and Pestel, Mankind at the Turning Point, New York: Signet Books, 1974.

Meadows, et. al., The Limits to Growth, New York: Signet Books, 1974.

Ecological/Environmental/Appropriate Technology/Humanistic

E. F. Shumacher, Small is Beautiful, New York: Perennial Library, 1973

Barry Commoner, The Closing Circle. New York: Alfred Knopf, 1971

Patrick Rivers, The Survivalists. New York: Universe Books, 1975.

P.D. Dunn, Appropriate Technology, New York: Schocken Books, 1979.

Mead and Hyman, World Enough: Rethinking the Future, Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1975

Barbara Stanford, Peacemaking: A Guide to Conflict Resolution, New York: Bantam Books, 1976.

A Guide to Cooperative Alternatives, Community Publications Cooperative, P.O. Box 426, Louisa Virginia 23093.

Technology

Arthur C. Clarke, Profiles of the Future, revised edition, New York: Harper and Row, 1973.

Robert Liston, Promise or Peril? The Role of Technology in Society. New York: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1976

Stephen Rosen, Future Facts, New York: Touchstone Books (Simon and Shuster), 1976.

Donald Clarke, editor, The Encyclopedia of Inventions, New York City, Galahad Books, 1977

James Burke, Connections, Boston: Little Borwn, 1978.

Peter Goodwin, Future World, New York, Crescent Books, 1979.

Stewart Cowley, Spacecraft 2000 to 2100 A.D. Secaucas, New Jersey: Chartwell Books, 1978

Robin Clarke, Building for Self-Sufficiency, New York: Universe Books, 1976.

Science Fiction

Almost any good science fiction writer raises questions about the future in dramatic ways. Such authors as Asimov, Arthur C. Clarke, Larry Niven, Heinlein, Walter Miller (A Canticle for Liebowitz) and many, many more are good bets for your own reading and for classroom use.

Be sure, however, that if you use these for classroom use you raise questions about their forecasts, scenarios, premises, etc.

Personal Futures

Alan Lakein, How to Get Control of Your Time and Your Life , New York: Signet Books, 1973.

John Crystal and Richard Bolles, Where Do I Go From Here With My life? Berkeley, CA.: Ten Speed Press, 1974.

Richard Bolles, What Color is Your Parachute? Berkelely CA.: Ten Speed Press, 1979

Richard Bolles, The Three Boxes of Life (And How to Get Out of Them), Ten Speed Press, 1978

Adele Scheele, Skills For Success, New York: William Morrow and Co., 1979

Tony and Robbie Fanning, Getting It All Done and Still Be Human, New York: Ballantine Books, 1979

Any other books about choices, decision-making, etc. are availalbe in bookstores and through the World Future Society.

Futures Education and Curriculum

Alvin Toffler, editor, Learning For Tomorrow, New York: Vintage Books, 1974.

James W. Botkin, et. al., No Limits to Learning, New York: Pergamon Press, 1979.

Don Glines, Educational Futures, Books I- IV, The Anvil Press, PO Box 37, Millville, Minnesota

Kierstead, Bowman and Dede, Editors, Educational Futures: Sourcebook I, Washington, D.C. World Future Society, 1979

Harold G. Shane, The Educational Significance of the Future, Bloomington, Indiana, Phi Delta Kappa, Inc., 1973.

Jim Bowman, et. al., The Far Side of the Future: Social Problems and Educational Reconstruction. Can be obtained through the World Future Society.

Canadian Content for Future Teaching

Futures Canada, Journal of the Canadian Futures Association, Univeristy of Western Ontario, London, Ontario

Center for Public Policy, 60 Queen Street, Ottawa, Ontario

The Gamma Group, McGill University, Montreal, Quebec

Canadian Peace Research Foundation, Oakville, Ontario

Science and Human Affairs Program, Dr. F. Knelman, Concordia Univeristy, Montreal

New Education? New Society? Essays on Cultural Futurism, Criticism and Educational Innovation by Harry Wagschal, H. G. Press, 41 de Breslay, Pointe Claire, Quebec.

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